United Nations A/AC.198/1999/L.1

General Assembly

Distr.: Limited
11 May 1999

Original: English

Committee on Information
Twenty-first session
3–14 May 1999

Draft report

Contents

Chapter		*Paragraphs*	*Page*
I.	Introduction	1–13	2
II.	Organizational questions	14–21	3
	A. Opening of the session	14	3
	B. Election of officers	15	3
	C. Adoption of the agenda and programme of work	16–18	4
	D. Observers	19–20	4
	E. Other matters	21	4
III.	General debate and consideration of substantive questions	22–47	4

99-13723 (E) 120599

Chapter I
Introduction

1. At its thirty-fourth session, the General Assembly decided to maintain the Committee to Review United Nations Public Information Policies and Activities, established under Assembly resolution 33/115 C of 18 December 1978, which would be known as the Committee on Information, and to increase its membership from 41 to 66. In paragraph 2 of section I of its resolution 34/182 of 18 December 1979, the Assembly requested the Committee on Information:

> "(a) To continue to examine United Nations public information policies and activities, in the light of the evolution of international relations, particularly during the past two decades, and of the imperatives of the establishment of the new international economic order and of a new world information and communication order;
>
> "(b) To evaluate and follow up the efforts made and the progress achieved by the United Nations system in the field of information and communications;
>
> "(c) To promote the establishment of a new, more just and more effective world information and communication order intended to strengthen peace and international understanding and based on the free circulation and wider and better balanced dissemination of information and to make recommendations thereon to the General Assembly",

and requested the Committee on Information and the Secretary-General to report to the Assembly at its thirty-fifth session.

2. At its thirty-fifth session the General Assembly, in its resolution 35/201 of 16 December 1980, expressed its satisfaction with the work of the Committee on Information, approved the report of the Committee and the recommendations of its Ad Hoc Working Group,[1] reaffirmed the mandate given to the Committee in Assembly resolution 34/182 and decided to increase the membership of the Committee from 66 to 67. The Committee on Information agreed, at its organizational session in 1980, that the principle of geographical rotation would be applied to all the officers of the Committee and that they should be elected for two-year terms of office.

3. At its thirty-sixth to fifty-first sessions the General Assembly again expressed its satisfaction with the work of the Committee on Information, approved the reports of the Committee[2] and its recommendations and reaffirmed the mandate given to the Committee in its resolution 34/182 (Assembly resolutions 36/149 B, 37/94 B, 38/82 B, 39/98 A, 40/164 A, 41/68 A, 42/162 A and B, 43/60 A and B, 44/50, 45/76 A and B, 46/73 B, 47/73 B, 48/44 B, 49/38 B, 50/31 B and 51/138 B). At its fifty-second session the Assembly took note of the report of the Committee[3] and adopted consensus resolutions 52/70 A and B of 10 December 1997. At its fifty-third session the Assembly took note of the report of the Committee[4] and adopted consensus resolutions 53/59 A and B of 3 December 1998, in which it reiterated its decision to consolidate the role of the Committee as its main subsidiary body mandated to make recommendations to the Assembly relating to the work of the Department of Public Information.

4. At its thirty-ninth session the General Assembly appointed two new members of the Committee, namely China and Mexico; at its forty-first session the Assembly appointed Malta as a new member of the Committee; at its forty-third session, the Assembly appointed Hungary, Ireland and Zimbabwe; and at its forty-fourth session, the Assembly appointed Nepal as a new member.

5. At its forty-fifth session the General Assembly decided, on the recommendation of the Committee on Information, to increase the membership of the Committee from 74 to 78 members, and appointed Czechoslovakia, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Jamaica and Uruguay as members. The Assembly also decided to appoint the Byelorussian Soviet Socialist Republic as a member of the Committee, with immediate effect, to fill the vacancy left by the German Democratic Republic.

6. At its forty-sixth session the General Assembly decided, on the recommendation of the Special Political Committee, to increase the membership of the Committee from 78 to 79 members, and appointed Burkina Faso as a member.

7. At its forty-seventh session the General Assembly decided, on the recommendation of the Committee, to increase the membership of the Committee from 79 to 81 and appointed the Republic of Korea and Senegal as members.

8. At its forty-eighth session the Assembly decided, on the recommendation of the Special Political and Decolonization Committee (Fourth Committee), to increase the membership of the Committee from 81 to 83, and appointed Gabon and Israel as members.

9. At its forty-ninth session the General Assembly decided to increase the membership of the Committee from 83 to 88, and decided to appoint Belize, Croatia, the Czech Republic, Kazakhstan and South Africa as members.

10. At its fiftieth session the General Assembly decided, on the recommendation of the Committee, to increase the membership from 88 to 89, and appointed the Democratic People's Republic of Korea as a member.

11. At its fifty-second session the General Assembly, on the recommendation of the Special Political and Decolonization Committee (Fourth Committee), decided to increase the membership of the Committee on Information from 89 to 90 members, and to appoint Georgia as a member.

12. At its fifty-third session the General Assembly, on the recommendation of the Special Political and Decolonization Committee (Fourth Committee), decided to increase the membership of the Committee from 90 to 93 members, and to appoint Angola, the Republic of Moldova and Solomon Islands as members.

13. The Committee is composed of the following Member States:

Algeria
Angola
Argentina
Bangladesh
Belarus
Belgium
Belize
Benin
Brazil
Bulgaria
Burkina Faso
Burundi
Chile
China
Colombia
Congo
Costa Rica
Côte d'Ivoire
Croatia
Cuba
Cyprus
Czech Republic
Democratic People's Republic of Korea
Democratic Republic of the Congo
Denmark
Ecuador
Egypt
El Salvador
Ethiopia
Finland
France
Gabon
Georgia
Germany
Ghana
Greece
Guatemala
Guinea
Guyana
Hungary
India
Indonesia
Iran (Islamic Republic of)
Ireland
Israel
Italy
Jamaica
Japan
Jordan
Kazakhstan
Kenya
Lebanon
Malta
Mexico
Mongolia
Morocco
Nepal
Netherlands
Niger
Nigeria
Pakistan
Peru
Philippines
Poland
Portugal
Republic of Korea
Republic of Moldova
Romania
Russian Federation
Senegal
Singapore
Slovakia
Solomon Islands
Somalia
South Africa
Spain
Sri Lanka
Sudan
Syrian Arab Republic
Togo
Trinidad and Tobago
Tunisia
Turkey
Ukraine
United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland
United Republic of Tanzania
United States of America
Uruguay
Venezuela
Viet Nam
Yemen
Yugoslavia
Zimbabwe

Chapter II
Organizational questions

A. Opening of the session

14. The organizational meeting of the twenty-first session of the Committee on Information was held on 3 May 1999 at United Nations Headquarters. The session was opened by the outgoing Chairman of the Committee, José Alberto de Sousa (Portugal).

B. Election of officers

15. The Committee held elections for a new Bureau for a two-year term. Upon the nominations by the representatives of Mexico, Slovakia and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, Holger Martinsen (Argentina), Ivan Nimac (Croatia) and Peter Mollema (Netherlands) were elected as Vice-Chairmen by acclamation. Upon the nomination by the representative of Pakistan, Sidharto Reza Suryo-di-Puro (Indonesia) was elected as Rapporteur, by acclamation. At a subsequent meeting, held on 5 May, upon the nomination by the representative of the United Republic of Tanzania, El Hassane Zahid (Morocco) was elected as Chairman by acclamation. The officers of the Committee on Information for the period 1999–2000 are thus as follows:

Chairman
El Hassane Zahid (Morocco)

Vice-Chairmen
Holger Martinsen (Argentina)
Ivan Nimac (Croatia)
Peter Mollema (Netherlands)

Rapporteur
Sidharto Reza Suryo-di-Puro (Indonesia)

C. Adoption of the agenda and programme of work

16. At its organizational meeting, the Committee adopted its agenda and programme of work (A/AC.198/1999/1/Rev.1):

1. Opening of the session.
2. Election of officers.
3. Adoption of the agenda and programme of work.
4. Statement by the Chairman.
5. Statement by the Under-Secretary-General for Communications and Public Information.
6. General debate and consideration of substantive questions.
7. Preparation and adoption of the report of the Committee to the General Assembly at its fifty-fourth session.

17. The Committee held the substantive meetings of its twenty-first session at United Nations Headquarters from 3 to 14 May 1999.

18. For consideration of item 6, the Committee had before it the reports of the Secretary-General on:

(a) Reorientation of United Nations activities in the field of public information and communications (A/AC.198/1999/2);

(b) Integration of United Nations information centres with field offices of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) (A/AC.198/1999/3);

(c) United Nations information centres in 1998: allocation of resources from the regular budget of the United Nations (A/AC.198/1999/4);

(d) Development of United Nations international radio broadcasting capacity: design and scope of a pilot project (A/AC.198/1999/5);

(e) Continuous development, maintenance and enrichment of United Nations Web sites (A/AC.198/1999/6);

(f) Activities of the Joint United Nations Information Committee (A/AC.198/1999/7);

(g) Proposed medium-term plan for the period 2002–2005 (programme 23, Public information) (A/AC.198/1999/8).

D. Observers

19. The following Member States took part in the session as observers: Armenia, Austria, Azerbaijan, Bahamas, Gambia, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Liberia, Luxembourg, Malawi, Monaco, Mozambique, Myanmar, Oman, Panama, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Sweden, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan. The Holy See also participated as an observer.

20. Representatives of the following specialized agencies also participated as observers: the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the International Labour Organization, the World Bank and the World Intellectual Property Organization. The United Nations Correspondents' Association also took part in the session as an observer.

E. Other matters

21. The Chairman informed the Committee that Mozambique had requested to become a member of the Committee on Information.

Chapter III
General debate and consideration of substantive questions

22. Statements during the general debate were made by the following States members of the Committee: Algeria, Argentina, Bangladesh, Belarus, Brazil, Chile, China, Costa Rica, Croatia, Cuba, Cyprus, Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Egypt, Ghana, Guyana (on behalf of the States members of the Group of 77 and China), India, Indonesia, Iran (Islamic Republic of), Jamaica (on behalf of the States members of the Caribbean Community), Japan, Kazakhstan, Mexico, Nepal, Netherlands (on behalf of the States members of the Western European and Other States Group), Pakistan, Philippines, Republic of Korea, Russian

Federation, Senegal, Spain, Sri Lanka, Syrian Arab Republic, Tunisia, Ukraine, United Republic of Tanzania and Yemen.

23. The Director of the Communications Division of UNESCO addressed the Committee, as did the President of the United Nations Correspondents' Association.

24. In taking up the substantive questions before the Committee, speakers underscored the significance of the World Press Freedom Day observance, which had been held prior to the opening of the session. One delegation called it a unique and valuable opportunity to reaffirm the vital importance of securing freedom of the press. Many speakers paid tribute to journalists everywhere who had lost their lives or suffered injuries in the line of duty and condemned the use of violence to silence them or obstruct their work. One delegation was of the view that a special international legal instrument should be elaborated to help protect journalists in circumstances of armed conflict. One delegation stated that discussions at that occasion testified to the need to establish a balance in the dissemination of information to ensure diversification of its sources and to attain a mutually beneficial partnership between the developed and developing countries. One speaker on behalf of a large group said that the establishment, maintenance and fostering of an independent, free and pluralistic press was essential to the development and maintenance of democracy. The UNESCO representative said that the Committee played a vital role in the defence of press freedom. He said that UNESCO had condemned violence against journalists and called upon Member States to stop all actions that deprived journalists of their rights.

25. Many speakers said they attached the highest priority to achieving a new, more just and effective global information and communications order, based on a free and balanced flow of information. They observed that state-of-the-art communications technologies transcended barriers of time and space, transforming all areas of human activity and rendering the world a global community. One speaker said the world had gone from the "Industrial Age" to the "Information Age". Many delegations believed that modern information technology and a transparent information network were key to progress and development, and were keenly aware that the gulf between developed and developing countries in the global information network remained wide. A number of delegations stated that that gap had become even wider. In the words of one delegation, for people still struggling in a hand-to-mouth existence, the Internet and digital television were "as far away and unimaginable as aliens are". Many speakers pointed to the need to rectify, on a priority basis, the imbalances in both the availability of information and in the capacity of different nations and organizations to process it. One delegation emphasized the "nexus between the establishment of the new international economic order and the new world information order" and pointed to the fact that information had become the lifeblood of domestic and global markets. Another speaker, referring to General Assembly resolution 53/70 of 4 December 1998, saw security of information as a vital priority, and called for the United Nations to create international principles to this end and to establish conditions for safe international information exchange.

26. In addressing the public information policies and activities of the United Nations, a number of speakers suggested that the Department of Public Information had an important role to play in bridging the information gap between developed and developing countries. One speaker said that the question "to be squarely addressed" was the extent to which the reorientation exercise would meet the aspirations of the developing world and correct the present imbalance in the field of information and communications. He said that the focus of any strategy must be on developmental issues, and urged the Department to do more. Several speakers were of the view that the desired outcome of the measures adopted to reorient the Department's activities was to project the Organization as an open, transparent and public institution, fully capable of meeting the principal objectives of the Charter of the United Nations. One speaker on behalf of a large group said that the information technology gap was likely to affect inter-State cooperation in a number of areas, including commercial and economic relations, and therefore the United Nations must ensure that the developing countries were equitably served in the field of communications and information. In the words of one speaker, "for the culture of information to permeate, we need to carry along the entire membership of the United Nations".

27. Most speakers agreed that the development of a culture of communications within the Organization was the prime responsibility of the Department of Public Information, in order to promote a better understanding of the United Nations and its impact on the lives of people everywhere. The view was expressed that the coming century would demand better and more efficient forms of public information. Dissemination of information on United Nations activities was seen by all speakers as essential to achieving a more peaceful and just world. To this end, one speaker said, strategic communications were crucial as a means of generating broader support for the Organization, and several others reiterated that the information and communications function should be placed at the heart of the

strategic management of the Organization. One speaker pointed to the importance of the Millennium Summit and Assembly in 2000 and said that the Department of Public Information should play a central role in formulating and implementing an effective public information strategy to ensure that the Summit enjoyed broad popular support.

28. Speakers congratulated the Under-Secretary-General for Communications and Public Information on his commendable efforts, within the limited resources available, to improve coverage of United Nations activities and to respond to the requirements of Member States. One speaker on behalf of a large group and a number of others noted the establishment of the Communications Group and the Strategic Communications Planning Group, which were aimed at better integrating information into the work of the entire United Nations system and at enhancing public awareness of the Organization. Several speakers asked for additional information on the composition, role and achievements of these bodies, as well as on their relationship to each other, in order to better assess their impact. In their view, such measures could, if effectively utilized, provide a greater focus, coordination and coherence to the Department's activities. Another delegation welcomed the increasing role of civil society in the redissemination of the message of the United Nations, as well as the role played by the Media Response Group in preparing timely responses to misinformation or criticism of the United Nations in the media. One speaker on behalf of a group said that with regard to strategic changes, the recent steps taken to improve the news gathering and delivery systems were welcomed, and her group would continue to monitor the effects of the enhanced news focus of the Department, in the light of the creation of a new News and Media Services Division.

29. Most speakers agreed that in the race to disseminate information in a world with many competing priorities, it was essential that the Department of Public Information be competent and competitive in disseminating information and sharing data and collaborative research. A number of speakers pointed to the crucial importance of developing, maintaining and enriching United Nations Web sites and congratulated the Department of Public Information for successfully operating a United Nations news section and Web page. One delegation thanked the Department for the "very comprehensive, easy-to-access and rich in content Web site it had put together". Another speaker suggested that the Department undertake a study on the fundamental impact of Internet technology on its public information activities. A speaker on behalf of a large group stressed that since the United Nations Web pages are essentially publications, they must be treated like other publications with due respect for balanced, comprehensive and objective information. One delegation said that it was important to ensure that documents containing information "from secessionist entities" not find their way to the official United Nations Web site.

30. In underscoring the fact, as reported by the Secretary-General, that most of the visits to the United Nations Web site come from developed countries, a number of speakers, including one on behalf of a large group, said that efforts must be made to redress this imbalance. Also, many speakers, while supporting the use of advanced technologies, including the Internet, stressed that this should not be done at the expense of traditional means of communication, such as radio, which continued to be the main source of information in most developing countries. Speakers said that they had welcomed assurances by the Secretary-General that the Department of Public Information would continue to maintain and expand the use of traditional means of disseminating information. They were of the view, therefore, that the discouraging conclusions in the report on the development of an international radio broadcasting capacity for the United Nations, which was before the Committee, contradicted such assurances. There was wide agreement on this point, and a delegate speaking for a large group said that his group expected the Department to proceed with the pilot project in order to reach a worldwide audience and thus redress, to some degree, the imbalances and inequalities between developed and developing countries in the field of information and communications. Another speaker said that his country disagreed with the Secretary-General's conclusion and with the criteria applied in reaching it, and called upon the Secretariat to implement the wishes of the membership and to reassess the situation regarding the pilot project, "including the means to appropriate the necessary financial resources for its implementation".

31. On the other hand, several speakers agreed with the Secretary-General's conclusion that a direct international radio broadcasting project would not be feasible until Member States and/or broadcast organizations concerned could provide the United Nations with the necessary budgetary and technical assistance. One speaker said that if the Department of Public Information decided to develop such a project, it would be advisable to consider first preparing a small-scale and less costly pilot project. Several delegations called for immediate circulation of the questionnaire to assess the availability of resources. One speaker on behalf of a large group asked the Secretariat to continue to look for the necessary finances and "to continue to investigate the technical feasibility of an international

broadcasting capacity for the United Nations, through contacts with Governments and broadcasters".

32. One speaker emphasized the important role of United Nations Radio and United Nations Television in disseminating information on the objectives of the Organization throughout the African continent. Another speaker said that his delegation considered the development of a telecommunications infrastructure in rural areas to be one of the greatest challenges and opportunities for the African continent. In that connection, his delegation intended to raise the possibility of installing a camera linked to the Internet inside the General Assembly chamber to bring live debates to schools in rural areas. Two speakers on behalf of large groups referred to the year 2000 computer problem and expressed the hope that the United Nations had done all it could to prevent its operations being affected and asked to be informed of the status of United Nations compliance.

33. One speaker expressed his appreciation for the Department's innovative audio service, which transmitted the United Nations noon briefing and radio news using the latest communications technology. The same speaker expressed his delegation's support for the utilization of direct satellite broadcasting services and stressed that the active participation of concerned Member States was vital in achieving the goals of this project. Another delegation said that it was heartened to note that Chinese language programmes were being delivered to major broadcasting stations in China as well as in North America by electronic audio transfer, and also welcomed the productive cooperation between United Nations Radio and China Radio International as well as China National Radio. This delegation said that the Chinese language production staff at United Nations Radio were highly professional, and asked that the Department take steps to increase resource allocations to Chinese programming. Another speaker said that his country was particularly satisfied with the agreement signed by the Brazilian Public Radio Network and United Nations Radio to allow for information in Portuguese to reach a wide number of listeners in Brazil through a receiving network. Another speaker said that radio remained the main medium of communication in the Caribbean, and therefore the Department should comply with the unfulfilled mandate to disseminate programmes in French and Creole. At the same time, she commended the Caribbean Radio Unit for its "sterling contribution" to awareness of the United Nations in the region.

34. A number of delegations condemned what they called the aggression carried out by a regional treaty organization, bypassing the United Nations and the Security Council, against a sovereign State. In particular, they condemned the bombing of its national broadcasting organization, which had resulted in casualties among its employees and the destruction of television and radio transmitters. One delegation said that it was the goal of that regional treaty organization to eliminate the information network of that country, while at the same time radio stations in its member States were transmitting unsanctioned broadcasts there. This was seen as violating the fundamental principle of freedom of information.

35. Another speaker said that over 1,600 hours of radio aggression, which originated in another Member State, were aired weekly in his country. This amounted to electronic warfare against its sovereignty and the norms of international law. Such broadcasts manipulated and distorted his country's reality and they should be denounced.

36. On multilingualism in information activities, a number of speakers emphatically supported the maintenance of linguistic diversity as a crucial part of the information policy of the United Nations. One speaker said that multilingualism was not only a question of principle, but also of effectiveness in presenting a pluralist image of the United Nations, and to this end, "the current expression of public information of the United Nations practically in a single language" was not acceptable. He used the Web site of a regional organization as an example of one that successfully incorporated 11 different languages. With regard to the use of all six official languages on the Web site, several speakers specifically supported proposal C contained in the report of the Secretary-General on continuous development, maintenance and enrichment of United Nations Web sites (A/AC.198/1999/6, paras. 33–42), which seeks to balance linguistic diversity and availability of resources for that purpose. One delegation said that while language parity was desirable in the provision of on-line information, cost implications could not be overlooked. Another delegation requested that the United Nations Web site offer more "dynamic contents in Spanish", a point with which another delegation agreed. Several delegations pointed to the enrichment of the United Nations Web site by the addition of Chinese and Arabic Web pages last year. Another commented that the current Chinese language site was "still far from satisfactory" in both content and scale, which was particularly unfortunate since Internet technology was developing very quickly in China. Another speaker supported more Russian programming using satellite broadcasting. One delegation on behalf of a large group said that the Department should be encouraged to continue to apply its resources to ensure that the United Nations message was delivered in the right mix of languages and with the right technology. One speaker, who reiterated the strong

conviction that public information could not be disseminated in a single language, was of the view that the objective of multilingualism was not simply a translation exercise, but was instead a matter of changing "the information architecture of the Organization itself".

37. One speaker on behalf of a large group and several other delegations said that the Department's publications should be objective and impartial, as should the information made available on the United Nations Web site. Several speakers noted that a large percentage of the population in the developing countries was not aware of the United Nations and suggested that it was in part the result of focusing too much attention of the Organization on certain developed countries "to galvanize public opinion with a view to getting increased funding for the Organization in the process".

38. With regard to specific information activities, one delegation said that the cooperative arrangements that the Department had established with the Department of Peacekeeping Operations were very important in the effort to disseminate information to and assist people in crisis and conflict situations. The rapid deployment and proper management of information components in peacekeeping operations, including a radio broadcasting capacity, could save lives. A number of speakers welcomed the work undertaken by the Department to highlight the activities and accomplishments of the Organization in the area of development and encouraged it to do more in this regard. Another, speaking on behalf of a large group, said that the general public should be equally aware of the Organization's development initiatives as they were of its peacekeeping operations. One speaker noted that there was a growing concern among a number of countries that the United Nations placed too much emphasis on publicizing activities in the field of maintaining international peace and security. Another agreed that the focus of any public information and communications strategy had to be on development issues, which were the basic challenge before the developing countries. Speakers cited economic and social development issues, such as poverty eradication, health education, human rights, gender equality and population, as key areas on which to concentrate. One delegation speaking on behalf of a group drew attention to the priority concerns of small island developing States.

39. Another speaker noted with pleasure that steps were being taken by the Department of Public Information for appropriate coverage of the various five-year reviews of the decade's major United Nations conferences. Another speaker said that information should be targeted to help the countries with economies in transition. Speakers encouraged cooperation between the Department, Governments and civil society to intensify advocacy of development issues. One delegate added that the Department should also assist the developing countries in improving their capacity in the field of public information and communications. In this connection, several speakers expressed their support for the Department's training programmes for broadcasters and journalists from developing countries and urged the Department to expand such programmes. Another delegation said that the Department could help in the effort to encourage a dialogue among civilizations, as envisaged in General Assembly resolution 53/22 of 4 November 1998. Several delegations expressed appreciation for the Department's efforts to publicize the humanitarian and environmental problems associated with the Chernobyl disaster. The Department's activities were important in the face of donor fatigue and the lack of funding for rehabilitation projects. One speaker pointed to the need for a long-term information programme on the disaster, and another requested a special Web site. Another proposed that the Department consider publicizing the problem of the former nuclear test site near Semipalatinsk, Kazakhstan, in the context of General Assembly resolution 53/1 H of 16 November 1998.

40. Many speakers emphasized that they attached great importance to the work of the United Nations information centres, emphasizing their importance in maintaining direct contact between the United Nations and local communities, as well as in serving as an important source of feedback in each country. Delegations were of the view that in the developing countries, particular emphasis should be given to integrating technological innovations into their activities so that centres could be models of "high-tech information for the resource-starved people", as one speaker described it. Another said that his delegation supported an increase in the level of resources made available to the United Nations information centres and services around the world, particularly in Africa. One delegation called for the Secretary-General to propose the financing of information centre posts, "preferably from the regular budget".

41. In regard to the process of integrating United Nations information centres with field offices of UNDP, one speaker on behalf of a large group expressed approval for such steps to reform information dissemination by United Nations bodies. In his view, the effectiveness of the United Nations message would be increased through a single "United Nations house" and the intertwining of all aspects of the United Nations information package. It was, however, a prerequisite of success to maintain a continuous dialogue with the Governments and relevant segments of society in

the host countries. Another speaker said that every effort must be made to ensure the successful integration of the two United Nations entities in order to strengthen overall information activity through collaborative partnership, in particular at a time of scarce resources.

42. However, a number of speakers, including one on behalf of a large group, expressed concern over the integration exercise. They agreed that a thorough review of the policy of integration was called for, in view of the findings of the Secretary-General's Task Force on the Reorientation of United Nations Public Information Activities, which indicated that the integration process had not been uniformly productive. They said that deficiencies had also been mentioned in the report of the Secretary-General on the subject (A/AC.198/1999/3), which was now before the Committee. Many delegations said that in the process of integration, cost-effective approaches should not hinder the information functions and autonomy of the centres. They suggested that financial and budgetary considerations should not take precedence over operational and strategic objectives. In this connection, several delegations recalled the Deputy Secretary-General's words that "reform is much more than just the question of streamlining structures or looking at the number of posts or dealing with the budget". One speaker said that integration was a narrowly focused policy that ignored the Organization's responsibilities to the people of the developing world. He said that the services and programme delivery of the integrated centres had drastically fallen, raising serious questions about the validity of the policy. Many speakers called for a case-by-case review of the performance of all integrated centres on a priority basis and in full consultation with the host Governments. A report on the review should be submitted to the General Assembly during its fifty-fourth session through the Committee on Information. Many speakers stressed also that any decision on integration of individual centres should be arrived at in consultation with the host Government and on a case-by-case basis. One delegation hoped that the Department of Public Information and UNDP would further study the problems of integration to ensure that United Nations information centres could perform their intended duties effectively. Several speakers referred to the guidelines to be elaborated between the Secretariat and UNDP, which would detail the operational framework for the integrated centres, and looked forward to reviewing them in the Committee before implementation. Another speaker was not certain that problems could be bridged merely by strengthening cooperation, and was of the view that more concrete measures directed at management roles were required. One delegation on behalf of a group suggested that there should be an institutionalized training programme for resident representatives/coordinators, which would incorporate an information component and become part of the Staff College programme.

43. One speaker said that the United Nations Information Centre in Dar es Salaam was one of those centres currently operating under the direction of the UNDP resident representative without formal integration and was struggling to serve even the Tanzanian population, much less the people of Lesotho and Mozambique, which it also serviced. Another said that the Centre in New Delhi should continue to be headed by a full-time Director at the D-1 level, and suggested that it highlight, in commemoration of the fiftieth anniversary of United Nations peacekeeping, the role of United Nations peacekeeping operations and India's long-standing commitment to participation in them. One speaker emphasized the importance that his delegation attached to the Centre in Islamabad and stressed the need for further strengthening of its effectiveness. One delegation said that in its capital of Zagreb, there was a small United Nations Liaison Office, as well as a UNDP office, and, in his view, the inclusion of an information component in the former office would serve the interests of the Organization and the region. Another noted the work of the United Nations Information Centre in Moscow, while one speaker supported the information component in Minsk. One delegation expressed appreciation for the work of the United Nations Information Centre in Colombo, and another said that the information component operating under the direction of the UNDP resident representative in the Ukraine was effective. Another speaker welcomed the appointment of a new Director in the United Nations Information Centre in Rio de Janeiro, and one said that the United Nations Information Centre in Tehran, which should be further strengthened, deserved admiration for its "useful service and cooperation with the Government of the Islamic Republic of Iran and with non-governmental institutions". According to one delegation, the United Nations Information Centre in Cairo, which had no longer been a Centre in the traditional sense of the word since its integration, was performing weakly. One speaker on behalf of a group commended the work of the United Nations Information Centre in Port-of-Spain, which served 14 Member States, as well as eight Non-Self-Governing Territories, and had suffered a decline in human and financial resources. She said that her group had called for several years for a national information officer to be reinstated in the UNDP multi-country office in Kingston, which served the northern Caribbean.

44. One delegation, in prescribing an "ethos of partnership" for the global community, suggested that delegations to the United Nations could form an open-ended group at the level of permanent representatives to work with the Department of Public Information to promote its objectives and to engage like-minded collaborators. While several delegations commented favourably on the Department's partnerships with the international media, non-governmental organizations and educational institutions, one speaker said that priorities of status were sometimes given to these groups to the detriment of Member States. In regard to working with the specialized agencies, programmes and funds of the United Nations system, one delegation pointed to the report of the Joint United Nations Information Committee, which highlighted proactive steps taken to foster a communications culture within the Organization.

45. A number of delegations expressed their appreciation for the services of the Dag Hammarskjöld Library. One delegation, speaking on behalf of a group, commended the positive steps made by the Department in modernizing the facilities of the Library through the creation of a "virtual library". She said that all delegations could no doubt attest to the user-friendly environment enjoyed by the missions, and suggested that the latter be able to participate, where possible, in courses organized for Secretariat staff. One speaker was appreciative of the Library's dissemination of information through electronic mail. Another noted that there appeared to be a reduced investment in books in the name of focusing on modern technology, and also that the Library should acquire an increased number of relevant publications and periodicals from the developing countries.

46. A number of delegations expressed disappointment that the reports of the Secretary-General due for consideration at the session were not available within the time-frame provided in General Assembly resolutions and expressed hope that in the future the reports would be available well in advance of the Committee's sessions.

47. At the end of the general debate, the Under-Secretary-General for Communications and Public Information made a statement responding to some of the questions raised by delegations.

Notes

[1] *Official Records of the General Assembly, Thirty-fifth Session, Supplement No. 21* (A/35/21), annex, sect. V.

[2] Ibid., *Thirty-sixth Session, Supplement No. 21* (A/36/21); ibid., *Thirty-seventh Session, Supplement No. 21* (A/37/21 and Corr.1); ibid., *Thirty-eighth Session, Supplement No. 21* (A/38/21 and Corr.1 and 2); ibid., *Thirty-ninth Session, Supplement No. 21* (A/39/21); ibid., *Fortieth Session, Supplement No. 21* (A/40/21); ibid., *Forty-first Session, Supplement No. 21* (A/41/21); ibid., *Forty-second Session, Supplement No. 21* (A/42/21); ibid., *Forty-third Session, Supplement No. 21* (A/43/21); ibid., *Forty-fourth Session, Supplement No. 21* (A/44/21); ibid., *Forty-fifth Session, Supplement No. 21* (A/45/21); ibid., *Forty-sixth Session, Supplement No. 21* (A/46/21); ibid., *Forty-seventh Session, Supplement No. 21* (A/47/21); ibid., *Forty-eighth Session, Supplement No. 21* (A/48/21); ibid., *Forty-ninth Session, Supplement No. 21* (A/49/21); ibid., *Fiftieth Session, Supplement No. 21* (A/50/21); and ibid., *Fifty-first Session, Supplement No. 21* (A/51/21).

[3] Ibid., *Fifty-second Session, Supplement No. 21* (A/52/21/Rev.1).

[4] Ibid., *Fifty-third Session, Supplement No. 21* (A/53/21/Rev.1).